2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

On hot evenings Hassan would provide me with a silk *kufieyh* 000
or Arab gown—which I wore in place of my jacket and shirt; this is a loose, cool garment, ideal for desert conditions and climate. We would sit in rattan chairs on the roof overlooking the sea, sipping the delicious clove-flavoured coffee and discussing philosophy, belles-lettres, or the humanities. Because of his wide reading and understanding, Hassan could see life from the European as well as from the Arab point of view, and his interpretations of Arab mentality and character helped me considerably to understand his people.

Most of the Arab tribes in south-east Arabia are extremely 771
strict in their interpretation of the Koran but, as with the followers 782
of other religions, there are exceptions to this rule. Many who 785
profess and call themselves good Moslems are extremely unorthodox in practice. The fast of Ramadan is, without exception, vigilantly observed by all Mohammedans, but a great many Arabs, especially those of the merchant class, fail to observe the stern tenets of the Prophet. Prayers are dutifully said at the prescribed hours, especially at sunset, when the faithful perform their genuflections and prostrations with religious zeal. But the middle and upper classes are rather liberal in their religious ideas. It is not uncommon for 276 ●
an Arab to smoke, even in public. The younger men prefer Turkish or Egyptian cigarettes, although most of the native shops in Sharjah and Dubai were well stocked with 'Lucky Strike', 'Camels' and 'Players', the source of these supplies being traceable to the U.S. and the R.A.F. canteens. The troops had no scruples about selling their rations for cash.

The older men would smoke native-grown tobacco in tiny pipes scarcely bigger than an acorn cup. After a few short puffs the brittle leaf would crumble into ashes, but they seemed to derive such pleasure from these brief smokes, perhaps because the leaf was tinctured with hashish. After use the pipe is placed in a small sheepskin pouch, which the Arabs carry about in the folds of their *abbas*, or gowns. The hubble-bubble is a Turkish innovation, used largely by the Persians and Parsees, and a crude form of this pipe is manufactured in Oman and sold in the bazaars.

The Arab seldom touches alcohol, and it is an offence to distil, 273
import or drink it in Sharjah territory. Nevertheless, a certain amount of bad Indian gin is brought in by the ships, and arrack is certainly distilled by the Indians in secret. I have never seen an Arab in these parts drink spirits, although an American officer once

dates, ground nuts, spices and ghee butter. One shop was devoted entirely to hubble-bubble pipes and we watched an old Arab carving a pipe stem. The stems, which are of bamboo, are fitted with a brass ring near the top to form a lip for the smoker, the body of the stem being delicately covered with gold and silver thread. The second stem, through which the air escapes, is of plain bamboo, engraved with Arabic designs which are carved with a red-hot knife, and then coloured with indigo. The bowl, made of unglazed pottery, has a slender neck flared at the top. These pipes cost about ten rupees each, the stems being a rupee extra.

Some of the shops are well stocked with canned goods and haberdashery from the Indian market, and one saw shelves full of sewing cotton, buttons, metal polish, brass lamps, and cheap cloth. A common sight is raw cotton, still in its pods, which is gathered from trees in the interior; untreated hemp and tobacco leaves, crudely dried. There were few carpets, and those we saw were of indifferent quality. A few of the merchants appeared to be well-off and one or two had robes of coloured silk, edged with gold thread. They had noble, intelligent faces, and one patriarch, with a snow-white beard and spotless linen *abbas*, looked out of place in that ill-assorted crowd. A large sapphire ring sparkled on his finger and his long, thin hands were those of an artist. One must be careful not to judge the Arab by Western standards, since dirt and insanitation are not abhorrent to them as they are to us. Even a cultured and fastidious Arab may have manners which would be out of place in a London drawing-room.

Apart from little girls up to ten years of age, we saw very few women, and they were heavily veiled. We walked to the little quay, which was clustered with dhows and rowing boats and watched the intense activity of shipbuilding and repairing that was in progress. The seams of the hulls are caulked with raw cotton and then covered with pitch, and the bottoms are painted with lime mixed with shark's oil, a good preservative. The upper part of the hull, above the water line, is also varnished with fish oil. Some of the sails are enormous and stretch from bows to stern, giving the dhows great speed on the water. This is necessary since they have to cover great distances, especially in the pearling season, when they may have to sail seventy miles in a single day to reach the beds.

There was quite a chilly breeze as we entered a ferryboat and were rowed across the creek, although the sun was still high above

travellers had declared did not exist in Oman. There was no road and the ground was hard and very bumpy, full of holes and nullahs. Tall grasses and shrubs grew in profusion, including *shinan* and the sea-green *harm* as well as some *Hadh* bushes, indicative of recent rain or heavy dews. The yellow flowers of the *zahr* blossomed in abundance, attracting myriads of insects, whilst several hares darted ahead of our truck and scurried away into their holes. The acacia (*samr*) trees grew in thin copses and were frequently fifteen feet high, which is unusual in this part of the desert.

When we had traversed five miles of this wooded country without so much as a trace of human life, our guides became nervous and begged to be allowed to return to Djaidh. We let them go, giving them a handful of biscuits and some tobacco as a gift, but before they left us they pointed to a site some two miles ahead where, they said, the *Badu* had last encamped. When we came upon this site we did, indeed, find the remains of a camp, the grass being lighter in patches than the surrounding herbage, whilst nearby was an old well and the dead embers of a fire. But of the *Badu* there was no sign.

We sat on a hillock for a few minutes, drinking tea, while Tandy and Williamson made a survey of the land; there were no tracks to guide us and nothing to indicate where the *Badu* might have concealed themselves. Sheikh Hamid, an amusing raconteur, recounted tales of the Beni Quitab tribe. These nomads number several thousand and, split into various sections, they roam all over the Oman country; branches of this tribe are to be found in the Nejd and Kuwait, but these have separate sheikhs and do not owe allegiance to Mohammed bin Ali. They are a wild, simple people, despising both the town dwellers and those who work with their hands. They live on dates, which they mostly steal, camels' milk, fish and rice. Some of these commodities they are obliged to buy, and the money for this purpose they obtain by selling camels, animal skins, including wolves, lizard and ibex; donkeys, wild honey, cheese and gazelle meat.

The Beni Quitab are famous camel breeders and during our trip across the *Marbakh* we saw large herds of these animals with their calves. They also breed donkeys, capturing the wild asses when young, and gather wild honey from the plains. Although they do as little work as possible, they cultivate small patches of ground to which they return twice a year, growing millet and tobacco, which they smoke in tiny pipes with cane stems.